



Representative Maryann Mitchell



30th District 1997 Session Report

Spring 1997

Dear Friends,

During the recently completed 1997 legislative session, lawmakers enacted two revolutionary reform measures that will change the welfare and juvenile justice systems dramatically in Washington. We forged an operating budget that is more than \$100 million below the Initiative 601 spending limit and is the lowest increase in government spending in 25 years. It was also the first time since 1957 the Legislature concluded its work on time in a budget-writing year.

Given each of these sizeable accomplishments, I'm very proud of the hard work done this year in Olympia.

We also addressed other pressing issues during the 105 days, including education, tax relief and regulatory reform. Unfortunately, however, little progress was made to improve the transportation problems we face in this state.

The specifics of all of these important issues are outlined in this report.

Finally, thanks to everyone who contacted my office during the session. Hearing your thoughts, ideas and concerns are critical for me to effectively represent you in the Legislature. If you have any questions, please call me at (360) 786-7830.

Sincerely,

Maryann Mitchell
Majority Caucus Vice Chair

Committees:

Transportation Policy and Budget, *vice chair*
Capital Budget
Criminal Justice and Corrections

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Protecting taxpayers, reshaping government and prioritizing education

With total spending of \$19.07 billion over the next two years, the state operating budget adopted by the Legislature for the 1997-99 biennium not only addresses the needs of the state, it also meets the objectives of Initiative 601 — by protecting taxpayers and limiting the growth of government.

The budget represents an increase of 7.7 percent over the current level, the smallest growth in 25 years, and continues our successful efforts to make government more accountable and responsive to the individuals and families of Washington. And by keeping the budget more than \$100 million below the limit established by Initiative 601, we helped ensure that state spending will be kept under control in the future.

Tax relief that's meaningful and fair

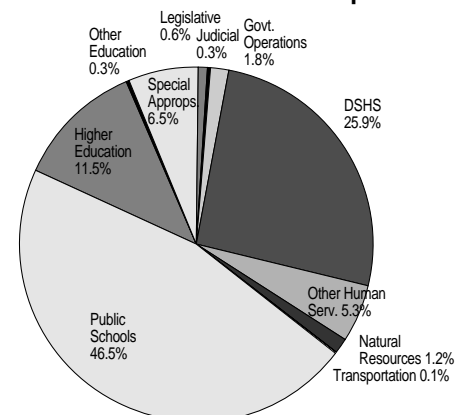
The Legislature approved \$414 million in tax relief — with cuts aimed at property taxpayers, senior citizens and small employers.

First, the Legislature continued the temporary 4.7 percent reduction in the state property tax levy that was enacted in 1995. Then, we approved a comprehensive property tax relief package that significantly reduces the state portion of the property tax, places stricter limits on the growth of property tax levies at all levels of government, and sets an assessment limit to protect homeowners from huge, unexpected increases in the assessed value of their property.

This reasonable and responsible property tax relief and reform package will be before voters this November.

Finally, the Legislature voted overwhelmingly to complete the repeal of the massive business and occupation tax increase unnecessarily imposed in 1993.

1997-99 General Fund-State Expenditures



Welfare reform requires personal responsibility

After 60 years, three generations of a welfare system that promoted dependency upon government, the 1997 Legislature adopted a historic new public assistance plan that will empower people to lift themselves out of despair, dependency and poverty and into self-sufficiency and economic independence.

Welfare will no longer be a one-way handout. Now, personal respon-

sibility and accountability will be required of recipients. Also, by focusing on the causes of achievement and success – like individual initiative, aspiration and hard work – opportunity will increase.

Public assistance will be limited to five years in one's lifetime and, from the time they first apply, all able adults will be required to work or perform community service in exchange for

benefits. All teen recipients will be required to live at home or in another state-approved setting and be actively progressing towards a high school degree.

To help single parents fulfill the new welfare work requirements, \$88 million was budgeted to assist them with the costs of child care, an increase of 36 percent.

Improving access to health care

One of the major challenges facing the Legislature this year was addressing the \$165 million deficit estimated in funding for the Basic Health Plan, the state's subsidized health insurance program for low-income citizens. Through a combination of funding increases and cuts in BHP administrative costs, we were able to adequately fund the anticipated enrollment for the coming years.

For senior citizens covered by Medicare, the Legislature also made permanent the exemption for Medicare from the state tax on health-care premiums and prepayments received by managed-care organizations. This change will save the average recipient about \$100 a year in costs that would otherwise be passed on to them.

Finally, the Legislature passed a comprehensive reform of the state's long-term care system to provide more protections for those using long-term care services. The consumer protections increased by the bill include facility standards, background screening of employees and patient rights. A joint legislative committee was also created to further examine long-term care issues.

Protecting our communities from juvenile crime

This year, the Legislature succeeded in enacting a juvenile justice reform measure — the most significant changes in 20 years. Our goal was to make a real difference both in protecting the public and in reducing the number of teens who become career criminals.

Our reform plan ensures that those hardcore juvenile offenders who commit violent crimes will be safely locked away in a secure correctional facility, where they belong, by broadening the law that tries and sentences them as adults. Now, teens who

commit drive-by shootings, first-degree robbery, first-degree child rape, or any crime when armed with a firearm will be prosecuted and sentenced as adults.

It also provides greater flexibility for prosecutors and judges to deal with juvenile offenders so that every youngster who breaks the law receives an appropriate combination of punishment and/or rehabilitation. Alternative sentencing options are encouraged, including boot camps, home detention, mandatory alcohol and drug treatment, and community service.

Making government more accountable

To make government more accountable to the citizens it's supposed to serve, the Legislature has been working to adopt responsible regulatory reform that eliminates the expensive mass of outdated, unnecessary and ineffective rules and regulations that clog the state bureaucracy.

Two years ago, the Legislature took a significant step toward adopting these objectives, approving strict limits on the authority of agencies to adopt new rules and directing that more assistance be given to the public in their efforts to comply with the law.

This year, the Legislature's major regulatory reform bill, HB 1032, requires agencies to review all new rules within seven years of adoption for effectiveness. Upon review, if a rule is determined to be outdated, duplicative or no longer necessary, it will be eliminated.

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College enrollments increased

We also increased access to higher education, boosting enrollments by nearly 6,400, continuing support for workforce training programs at the two-year colleges to serve up to 7,200 individuals, and increasing student financial aid to help students from low- and middle-income families.

Also, legislation to create an advanced college tuition payment program was approved to allow parents to purchase tuition units now that would be redeemable for future tuition at any Washington college or university. For more information, contact the Higher Education Coordinating Board at (360) 753-7800.



K-12: Improving public schools

Strengthening education to make sure our children have the basic skills and knowledge they need to be successful was a high priority this year for the Legislature.

As an example, education is the first budget priority, with more resources directed into the classroom to improve teaching and help students learn. Funding for K-12 education was enhanced \$288 million, including \$59 million in grants for technology and instructional materials — about \$458 per average size classroom. Another \$75 million was spent to fully fund new school construction.

In an effort to return to the fundamentals of basic education, we adopted legislation to help schools do a better job of teaching reading in the earliest grades. We also adopted legislation giving educators the tools and authority to maintain greater discipline in the classroom, as well as free local schools from unnecessary

Rep. Mitchell, vice chair of the House Transportation Policy and Budget Committee, addresses legislators on the House floor regarding the transportation budget.

and excessive government regulations that thwart efforts to improve education.

Funding future new school construction

Since the 1960s, revenues from state timber sales — roughly \$175 million per biennium — have been dedicated for the construction of new public schools. But since the mid-'80s, the need for school construction revenue has regularly exceeded that figure. To make up the difference, the Legislature, in recent years, has been forced to use general fund money and general fund bonds.

To address this problem, the Legislature this year created a school construction trust fund, a proposal which I co-sponsored, that will eventually fully fund new school construction.

For sixteen years, beginning in 2000, \$62.5 million of revenue generated from the state lottery will be placed in this trust fund annually — long enough to create a fund that would be self-perpetuating. After that, the interest generated would be enough to cover the state's projected school construction budget.

Transportation budget does not increase gas tax

The Legislature approved a \$3.1 billion transportation budget that did not include an increase in the state's gas tax. Instead, a performance audit of the Department of Transportation, including the ferry system, the State Patrol, and the Department of Licensing was funded to closely scrutinize spending and determine if additional efficiencies can be made in those state agencies.

The new transportation budget will fund the continuation of work that is already in progress, including the most critical safety improvements statewide. Unfortunately, however, the current timelines for their completion

will be slowed. I was also particularly disappointed that no new projects could be included in the spending plan.

The simple fact is that there is not enough existing revenue to meet the state's pressing transportation needs. Until legislators are willing to step up and address this critical problem, traffic congestion in the Puget Sound region is only going to get worse and commute times and the cost of transporting goods will continue to increase statewide.

To improve safety and response times for motorist assistance, 66 new

troopers will be added to the Washington State Patrol, funded mostly through federal tax dollars. Also included were funds to expand the State Patrol's drugged driver program, which has been extremely effective in arresting and successfully prosecuting people who drive while on drugs.

Finally, about \$100 million of Motor Vehicle Excise Tax money was transferred from the general fund for additional transportation projects that address freight mobility and economic development. However, this is a one-time transfer, so its impact on the state's six-year \$6 billion highway project list is negligible.

Seahawks' stadium set for public vote

The Legislature approved a statewide referendum on a plan to finance construction of a new football stadium for the Seattle Seahawks. I cast my vote "yes" in the Legislature because I believe the consequences of losing the team are serious enough that you deserve an opportunity to vote on the issue.

Under the proposal to be considered by voters, the Kingdome would be torn down and replaced by a new

football stadium and exhibition center. The total cost of the project is \$425 million. The Seahawks would put up \$100 million (\$50 million by July 1 of this year), guaranteed by team owner Paul Allen. \$300 million of state funds would be raised through an extension of the current hotel/motel tax in King County from the year 2012 to 2020 (\$40 million), a sales tax credit and deferral (\$101 million), and new state lottery games (\$127 million). The balance would be

raised by King County through a 10 percent tax on admissions and parking at the new facility (\$56 million).

Excess funds — approximately \$30 million — and an additional \$10 million from Paul Allen would be used to develop new play fields across the state.

The public vote on the \$300 million state portion of the \$425 million cost of the new stadium is scheduled for June 17.

What issues interest you the most?

This fall, I'll be hosting a series of three town hall meetings, each one focused on a different issue to be debated during the 1998 legislative session. Information will be presented and citizens will be able to ask questions and make comments.

Which issues would you like to have addressed during these public forums? Please fill out the form below. Then, detach and return it to my office in Olympia: Rep. Maryann Mitchell, P.O. Box 40600, Olympia, WA 98504-0600. We'll notify you of the final town hall schedule later this year.

Name: _____ Phone: () _____

Address: _____ City: _____ Zip: _____

Issue: _____

Comments: _____
